Castlemaine Naturalist

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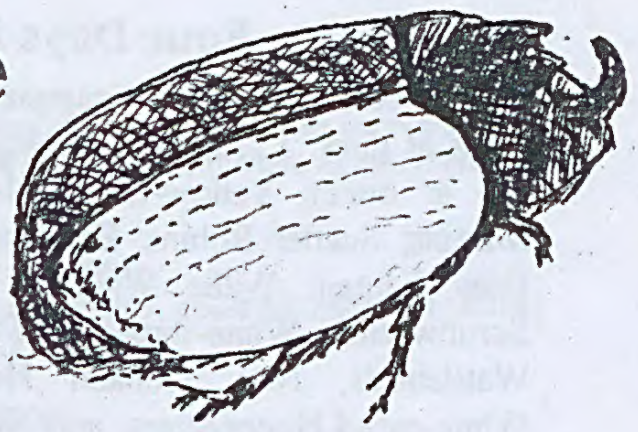

WAIT! DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR ENVELOPE YET!
Check your name. If it is followed by (p) you have paid your sub. this year, if it is followed by (-), you've forgotten!
Subs can be posted to the treasurer c/o P.O. Box 324, or paid at the next meeting.

Raven Invasion

After their first appearance two years ago the raven population at this end of town seems to have increased to alarming numbers in Hunter Street. The original two pairs have produced two sets of offspring this season - also in pairs! This has resulted in the intimidation of all the smaller birds and our peaceful surroundings have been disturbed by incessant cawing, croaking and gargling accompanied by loud bangs and thumps as they landed on the roof and scrambled around from dawn 'til dark. A favorite feeding spot for the young seemed to be the edge of our old fashioned brick chimneys. One of these had missed out on being sealed when we moved in, and after a rather heavy shower of rain I notice a small trickle of water had emerged on the hearth inside, and was reminded it was time to remove the solid wooden screen and vacuum for lurking Red Backs.

To my astonishment the fireplace was littered with bones of all sizes - lamb shanks, pork bones etc., gathered for the marrow on which the young were fed, and still containing some which had developed an undesirable stench! Gathered from all around the neighborhood no doubt, but next door in particular where the dog enjoyed her daily scrunch and the bones were left scattered around the garden, they provided a handy meal. This explained the occasional loud bangs on our galvanized roof as they were dropped en route to the chimney!

Hopefully the new generation will move off to new territory.

Shirley Parnaby.

Four Days in the Grampians

On a recent visit to the Grampians I spent several hours bird watching by dams at dusk. I recorded:- Common Bronzewings; Gang-gang Cockatoos (11 at once); Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos; Crimson Rosellas; Tree Martins; Scarlet Robins; Eastern Yellow Robins; a Grey Shrike-thrush; a Grey Fantail; Willie Wagtails; White-browed Babblers; White-browed Scrubwrens; White-throated Treecreepers; Brown Treecreepers; Red Wattlebirds; New Holland Honeyeaters; White-plumed Honeyeaters; White-eared Honeyeaters; and two Grey Currawongs who enjoyed a good thirty minutes bathing in the shallows.

The only flowers I saw were:- Cranberry Heath *Astroloma humifusum*; Flame Heath *Astroloma conostephoides*; Silver Banksia *Banksia marginata*; Cats Claws *Grevillea alpina*; Bundled Guinea-flower *Hibbertia fasciculata ssp prostrata*; Erect Guinea-flower *Hibbertia riparia*; Twisted Beard-heath *Leucopogen gracialis*; Pine Heath *Astroloma pinifolium*; Common Correa *Correa reflexa*; and Heathy Phyllota *Phyllota pleurandoides*.

I went with Friends of the Grampians/Gariwerd (FOGG) on a visit to the Heatherlie Quarry off the Halls Gap/Mt. Zero Road. It is well worth a visit to see this historical sandstone quarry where some of the old mining equipment (crane parts, compressors, tanks and train trolleys etc.) are still in place along with a number of restored stone buildings from the same era. I was fascinated to see where the trolleys were filled with sandstone and pushed along a small gauge track to a site where they were tipped over and unloaded onto the Melbourne train waiting below in a cutting. Jeff Kennett was keen to open this Quarry to supply more stone for his planned extension to Parliament house but FOGG campaigned successfully for the area to remain untouched as a historical site within the lovely bushland of the Grampians National Park.

The only downside to my short stay was the fact that I caught some unfamiliar animal in a mousetrap I had set in the pantry. It is has since been identified as an (Agile?) Antechines so I will be very reluctant to set any more traps!

Geraldine Harris

Report on the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association meeting at Royal Park March 8, 2003

The weekend was organised by the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and held at the Urban Camp, Royal Park, which is at the site of the former Royal Park military camp. I attended the meeting on Saturday evening. Fourteen clubs were represented, and about 60 members attended the campout.

The program for the weekend

Some of the excursions were:

Bureau of Meteorology training camp, Broadmeadows
Behind the scenes at the Zoo
Behind the scenes at the Aquarium
Point Cook wetlands
Botanical Gardens with the Friends of the Gardens

Behind the scenes at the Museum of Victoria.

The committee

The committee has been enlarged, and the position of vice president has been added. Three members of the committee retire each year. The new committee of the VFNCA, is, with retirement dates:

Dick Southcombe (Geelong FNC). President [ret 2006]
Noel Schleiger (FNC of Victoria) Vice President [ret 2004]
John Gregurke (FNC of Ballarat) Correspondence secretary, assist MC2/web [ret 2004]
Helen Langley (Timboon FNC) Minute secretary [ret 2005]
Rob Moors (Bendigo FNC) Treasurer [ret 2006]
Ern Perkins (Castlemaine FNC). MC2/web [ret 2005]
Dave Munro (Hamilton FNC) Archivist. [ret 2005]
Norma Garlic (Sale FNC) [ret 2006]
Aileen Stewart (Sunraysia FNC) [ret 2004]

Regional Guides

Latrobe and Geelong FNC have produced regional guides. Hamilton FNC is preparing a similar production. Perhaps all clubs could produce guides for their area. Perhaps in time, guides will cover all of Victoria.

The Nature of Warnambool.

Warnambool FNC is preparing *a guide to the Natural History and environment of our city*. Topics covered in the book include rocks and landscape, the marine environment, the inland waters, vegetation, birds, land fauna, reptiles, amphibians, and insects and invertebrates. A $2000 loan has been made to the club from the VFNCA, similar to the recent loan made to the Ballarat FNC. The Ballarat FNC book has sold well, and the loan to the VFNCA has been repaid.

The New Museum.

Concern was expressed that funding shortages will result in reduced basic research and collection, and that the limited funds will be directed to the public activities. The museum is required to charge for admission, but other attractions (e.g. the National Gallery) have free admission. A letter will be written to the Government asking for better funding for the museum, and pointing out the need to maintain and extend the research activities. Clubs may also wish to take this up

The VFNCA and the Internet using My Connected Community

Sixteen members from ten clubs have joined the group. FNC of Ballarat is best represented, with five members. Castlemaine FNC has three members. The site is administered by Ern Perkins and John Gregurke. It is hoped that the site will be greatly improved during the year.

Coming VFNCA meetings.

11, 12 Oct., 2003 Portland (Portland FNC)
8,9,10 Mar 2004 Kangaroobie (Timboon FNC)

Ern Perkins

Observations

• A report comes from the Kalimna Preservation Society of a family of Speckled Warblers consisting of two adults and two juveniles which have been seen in the Point area of Kalimna. The tall trees, leaf litter and understory all make it an ideal habitat for these quaint little birds.

• Walking through Kalimna it was very obvious how the Cootamundra Wattle, *Acacia baileyana*, has spread through this area. Also obvious was the amount of Wireleaf Mistletoe, which seems to prefer Cootamundra as a host. However it was also seen on Lucerne Trees up near the pressure dam

in Hunter Street.

• Margaret Dunne noticed a fallen branch of a Grey Box (Eucalyptus microcarpa) with flowering buds that increased in number even though the branch was severed from the tree and wondered if this could be the result of a flow of nutrients due to gravity?

• Ern Perkins reported a flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos in the Eucalypts in the North School grounds.

• Ken Dredge saw a flock of 200 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos near Colac. He also was called to identify a bird that had been on the side of the road for two days in Ranters Gully Rd. The bird, which was quite ferocious when approached, turned out to be a Tawny Frogmouth with some injuries around its beak. The vet thinks it will possibly make a full recovery.

• Bob Hughes reported a sighting of three Swift Parrots in his Lismore garden. March is considered early, however three Swift Parrots were sighted in Geelong in February which is very early.

• A White-throated Nightjar was sighted in the forest at Elphinstone. Ern Perkins

• In Coburg a Hobby was seen plucking a Starling on an overhead street pole with feathers falling down on passers-by. Phil Collier

• Multiple reports of Grey Box in full flower earlier than usual.

• Ern has made further queries regarding the mystery of the juvenile Brown Goshawk found dead on a front verandah (reported in the March newsletter). He has been told by Albert Golden that birds like the Goshawk never take bait but juveniles are well known for killing themselves as a result of collisions with trees and houses. We can therefore conclude that this young bird probably died as a result of such an accident.

• Rita Mills sighted a Scarlet Robin near the great Dividing Trail near where it crosses the Helbe Track on way to Vaughan. Richard Piesse lives nearby, and said that he has seen the robins in this area regularly.

• A hybrid *Acacia decurrens* x *A. bailiana* was found in Kalimna. Ern

• John Cole noted that Smilax/Bridal Creeper **Asparagus asparagoides* and Gorse **Ulex europaeus* have started their new seasons growth with gusto.

• He also noted that Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata* is very green and obvious in the bush now. Areas that are usually covered in vegetation are now almost bare with just a covering of dry leaves and rock outcrops etc. are more obvious than usual, and what is still alive and green stands out

• Richard Piesse reported that there are just as many birds as ever as at his place possibly because he has two dams to attract them.

• Galahs are more likely to die in March because their crèches are no longer operating leaving the youngest birds on their own before they are suitably world wise and able to feed themselves. Rita

• John Turnbull has seen a tortoise in Blakeley Road.

• A family of five Red-browed Firetails, are regular visitors to our garden but sadly I remember when I often counted 20-30 birds on our back lawn. Geraldine Harris

• Margaret Badminton has been keeping a record of robins at her place, and reports that the Scarlet Robin is back a month earlier than usual.

• Towards the end of February Shirley Parnaby noticed a pair of juvenile Southern Boobook owls perched side by side in the usual cypress in the Botanical Gardens, but no sign of the adults, and on recent visits she hasn't seen the owls at all.

• At the lake she reports a Little Pied Cormorant and a White Ibis perched almost side by side, the ibis making a few plaintive noises in the direction of the cormorant, which unmoved! Obviously a juvenile, the ibis had no colouring at all, even head and bill were completely white.

• The Parnaby house has had European Paper Wasps very active around the exterior, as they also were last year. .

PLANTS OF THE MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Grey Everlasting, *Ozothamnus obcordatus*

Preferring dry, rocky areas this everlasting has rather flat terminal heads of small (wheat grain size), yellow flowers in late spring to mid summer. It gets the name "Grey" Everlasting because the bracts, which persist after the yellow flowers have finished, are grey. The small attractive heart-shaped leaves, which are broader at the apex and notched, are shiny dark green above and whitish under The rather stiff, slender shrub usually grows to about 40 cm tall in this area

Tips for Excursions

[This is a reprint of the article in CN161, with some updates and changes - the law about parking on curves has changed, and there is now a greater emphasis on safety.]

The leader

*When the excursion is advertised, give an indication of the length of the drive and the type of roads/tracks to be travelled on. Also indicate the length and difficulty of any walk.

*Check the excursion location for safety. Are there hazards that are best avoided e.g. steep unprotected drops, washed out footpaths, or slippery areas? Are the stopping places safe e.g. is there off road parking, and is there a clear 100 metres sight distance from corners? Avoid stopping on highways unless there is ample off-road parking.

* On the excursion day, inform the drivers of other vehicles of the route to be taken. It is not safe to travel in a convoy along a major highway. It is best to indicate a meeting place e.g. Newstead PO.

*Check that the attendance book has been signed, and that there is a first aid kit.

*It is a good idea to appoint a "tail-end Charlie" who knows the route, on both walks and drives.

*At major turnings, particularly on minor roads/tracks, wait until the last vehicle/walker arrives.

*If the convoy is likely to be large, provide ribbons for the cars, so that members can readily identify the cars in the convoy.

*At stopping places, say how long the stop will be. Also indicate what the attractions at this stop are.

*When leading off, let the others know where the next stop will be.

*Announce when the excursion is ended. There is no need to drive home in convoy, once the route home is clearly known.

*Remember that safety is paramount. Do not hesitate to cancel the excursion if the weather is unsuitable, or becomes unsuitable.

Members on the excursion

*If possible share transport.

*Make sure that you have supplies e.g. sufficient petrol, before starting.

*Do not leave the excursion without telling the leader, and tail person, and any other who might be affected.

*Take responsibility for the person behind you. Wait at corners, intersections, or any place where the route is not clear, until the person behind has caught up.

*Never travel at an uncomfortable or unsafe speed. The person in front will wait until you have caught up.

*If the worst happens, and you get lost, just wait. Someone will come looking for you.

*Do not get in front of the leader; many leaders count regularly, to check that all is well. Or the route may be different to what you suppose.

*Do not get behind the tail-end car/walker. Often, the leader does not count, but waits only for the tail to appear.

All members One of the advantages of group excursions is that there are many pairs of eyes and ears. Share with others what you see and find. Things that may be commonplace to you may be of great interest to others. And ask questions.

The CFNC excursions start promptly. If you arrive a minute late you may have missed the excursion. EP.

NOTE: If three lost members of the group inspecting Kalimna suddenly appeared when Dean Bridgefoot produced a chocolate cake for morning tea, should a chocolate cake be added to our first aid box in case anyone goes missing on CFN walks ?

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 27/3

The Club CD *Is it a Weed?* should be back in the hands of the club from the publishers by the time you receive this newsletter. About 100 CDs will be issued free to LandCare groups, Schools, etc., and costs are to covered

by the Shire. Flyers with an order form on the back will go out at the same time so that people who require one for themselves may obtain one at a cost of $5 "over the counter" or $7 posted.

The launch will be held in the **Ray Bradfield Rooms at 2 pm???? on Wed. April 30.**

The Club has been asked to set up **a display in the Market during May**. This will be done on Fri. May 2 between 12 and 2 pm. On the following Sunday, Research Day ??? two computers will be set up, one to display the Box/Ironbark CD and the other the *Is It a Weed ?* CD.

A pamphlet has arrived from **Trust For Nature, Help Save Ned's Corner,** a property of 30,000 ha. in north western Victoria. A private property, it contains "a mosaic of rare land forms and threatened ecosystems, including a massive ancient alluvial plain and 35 kms of habitat along the Murray River". The pamphlets will be available at the April meeting. Meanwhile, more information can be obtained from www.tfn.org.au, or by phoning 96709933. The Club is forwarding $200 from the Conservation fund, but we encourage you to add your private donation if you so wish.

Donations to the Conservation Fund, which is used for projects such as the Ned's Corner one, or local ones like Kalimna, **are always welcome.** Please specify if you are making a donation to the Conservation Fund, otherwise it will just go into general funds.

The next **Broom Pull** is mooted for Thursday 28 August. Details later.

Welcome to the Club Allison Rowe of Maldon.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club,
PO Box 324,
Castlemaine.
Incorporation #A0003010B

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Reminder - Articles, reports and observations for the CN can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barker St. if that is more convenient for you.

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from **The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street**. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are **NO excursions on total fire ban days.**

Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, April 2003.

Programme

Visitors are welcome at club meetings and excursions.

Fri. Apr. 11 *Maintaining Diversity in Mount Alexander Shire*, Geoff Parke. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat Apr. 11 (8.30 the on Monday 14 if the weather is unsuitable on Saturday). *Roadside Cleanup.* Meet near Taits Carriages, 8.30. Remember the more people to do the job, the quicker we'll be. Gloves and safety vests provided. Wear sturdy footwear.

Sat Apr. 12, *Muckleford Forest in Drought.* . Leader, E. Perkins. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.

Sun. May 4. *Ballarat FNC visiting* the area. All day excursion. Details later. Sun May 4. Display in the Market Building

Fri. May 9 *Insects,* Allan Yen. Allan Yenn has been surveying the Eltham Copper Butterfly colony found in Kalimna Park. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. May 10 *The new Walking Trail on Mount Alexander*. Leader R. Piesse. Leave from the Octopus at 1.30pm. Wear sturdy footwear.

Fri. June 13 *Plantings in the Drought* - Jenni Collier. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. June 14 *Barkly Park, Taradale.* Leader, J. Collier. Leave the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.

Fri. July 11 *Snakes in the Hand* - Chris Hay, licensed snake handler. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat July 14 *Eppalock - glacial remains.*

Fri. Aug. 8 *History of the Coliban Water Channels* - Geoff. Russell, UCA hall, 8pm

Sat. Aug. 8 *Coliban Water Channel* -

Fri. Sept. 12. *Sri Lanka's Birds* - Stuart Dashper, Birds Australia

Fri. Oct. 10 *Platypus Conservancy* - Dr. Melody Serena.

Fri. Nov. 14. *Natural History, Outback* - Trevor Blake

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2003 Committee - C. Morris (President) 9985 4221, J.Turnbull (VP and Grievance Officer) 5474 3035, G Broadway (Secretary) 5472 2513, H van Gemert (Treasurer) 5472 1082, E Perkins, R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), G Harris, (Ass't Newsletter Editor), B Maund, M Oliver R Piesse and J Cole.

Subscriptions for 2003 -

Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24.

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*

(A little worry - if Ern Perkins is VFNPA Web-master (his term!), does that make him some sort of spider? Or mean he's good at spinning yarns?)
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